



# Beating the odds to graduate

You can't wipe the big smile off the face of Justin, a HOPE senior at Brighton Leadership High Academy. That's because Justin is close to meeting a life goal by graduating from high school this spring.

"I am the first one in my family to graduate. I know I need this for my future. It will make me a better person and help me build my life," said Justin.

Justin hasn't had the typical path to graduation. He spent much of his early years in foster care and even battled drug addiction and lived on the streets. Justin was eventually adopted by a family who served as great role models for him. And he had finally found a place where he could finish his high school education, HOPE at Brighton Leadership High Academy. However, just before the start of this school year, Justin was diagnosed with Ewing's Soft Tissue Sarcoma Cancer.



**“All the odds have been against me, but I am overcoming it.”**

In August, Justin had three tumors removed from his leg. He started visiting Children's Hospital Colorado every week in September to receive chemotherapy or complete blood work. Justin will finish his treatments, and hopefully be cancer-free, for graduation day on May 21.

"All the odds have been against me, but I am overcoming it," said Justin, who said he will have a large cheering section at graduation. "HOPE is giving me a chance at life, and I don't know where I'd be without it."

Justin is particularly thankful for the support the students and staff at HOPE Online Learning Academy Co-Op have given to him this last year to get him to graduation. They work school assignments in and around his chemotherapy schedule. Additionally the families in his HOPE Learning Center have raised funds to help offset the costs of his treatments.

"It feels like family. I've never had support like this before," commented Justin.

Justin's favorite school subjects are science and history. He plans to become an x-ray technician after high school, and later, possibly, a pastor and/or a barber.

"The name of this school, HOPE, really speaks for itself. They have truly given that to me, always encouraging me and telling me I can do it. I feel like I am living in a dream. This is amazing, and my heart will be forever endlessly thankful," Justin said.

Ms. Kim Vega, Manager, HOPE at Brighton Leadership Academy, is proud of Justin and the students her Learning Center serves.

"I'm honored to work with HOPE Online Learning Academy Co-Op. We are giving youth, no matter their struggles, a path to contribute to society in a positive way," she said.

Graduation for HOPE Online Learning Academy Co-Op will take place at 7 p.m. on Thursday, May 21, at Metro State University of Denver.

# Working to make a difference

Ten years ago the husband of Ms. Denise Duran, Director of Greeley's HOPE at New Hope Academy, came to her with the idea to open a HOPE Online Learning Academy Co-Op Learning Center in the Commerce City area. At the time, Ms. Duran was burnt out from her "Corporate America" job and was looking for a change. She had a background in teaching, but wasn't sure about her husband's proposal.

"But I decided to try it, and I have loved every minute," said Ms. Duran.

Ms. Duran spent five years overseeing a HOPE Learning Center in Commerce City before going to New Hope Academy in Greeley. She first started as a mentor, and then, after a year, was offered the director position.

"I've realized that I don't want just a job. I want to be making a difference, and in this role I am touching lives daily."

Ms. Duran has been very impressed with HOPE's learning model as it meets kids' needs.

"Other environments don't offer the flexibility we have at HOPE. If kids don't understand it one way, we can look at it another way until we find a way for them to grasp the concept," she said.

During her tenure with HOPE, Ms. Duran has developed personal connections with her students, even being involved in their lives after graduation. She was touched to be invited to the wedding and baby

shower of one of her former students who has established a successful insurance agency in the community.

"Trust is an important part of the HOPE model. Our families appreciate that we get to know their children," she commented.

Ms. Duran is valued as a HOPE educator for the respect she has learned how to gain from her students.

"She really shows her students she cares, and this dedication has helped her build strong HOPE Learning Centers in the process," said Sherida Peterson, HOPE's Executive Vice President of Academic Achievement.

Ms. Duran is proud of the great reputation she has built for New Hope Academy in the Greeley area. This spring her Learning Center has eight graduating HOPE seniors, one of whom has been with New Hope Academy since it opened 10 years ago.

It should come as no surprise that Ms. Duran was honored as one of HOPE's two representatives, along with Ms. Seter, at the 2015 Douglas County School District's Apple Awards.



Ms. Denise Duran



## Upcoming HOPE Activities

Watch HOPEonline.org and HOPE's social media channels for the latest on HOPE's happenings!

- Spirit Week: April 6-10
- Prom: April 10
- Arts Across Cultures Performance @ Denver Art Museum: April 26

- Argument Competition: May 7
- High School Picnic: May 8
- Spring Field Day: May 15
- Graduation: May 21

**Last Day of School: May 29**

## A life's path to teaching

In 4th grade, Ms. Desirae Seter took her first steps to becoming a teacher. When her brother, Daniel, began kindergarten, Ms. Seter created a make-shift classroom in her grandma's garage and helped her brother learn to read and complete other homework assignments.

"Ever since, I have never seen myself doing anything else," said Ms. Seter.

Ms. Seter landed her first "real" teaching job three years ago when she joined HOPE Online Learning Academy Co-Op as a General Education Teacher. She sought out her role at HOPE as she wanted to work with high-risk students and make a big difference.

"I wanted to be a positive role model for these children," Ms. Seter said.

Math and science are the subjects Ms. Seter most enjoys. In fact, she completed her Masters in Math and Science curriculum from the University of Colorado Denver in May 2014.

"Our students really enjoy math and science. Many seem to pick it up pretty easily, even if they struggle in other subjects," she said.

What Ms. Seter loves about the HOPE learning model is that kids develop an ownership in their education by setting goals and tracking their progress in meeting them.

"I also have the time to show my students I really care how they are progressing, and this makes them care more," Ms. Seter commented.

Ms. Seter is truly grateful for all the experiences she has had as a HOPE teacher.

"Our staff goes above and beyond, we are providing our kids what they need the most," she said. "I never would have anticipated a teaching experience like this. It is so different, in a good way, but I like the sense of teamwork here. You never feel like you are in this by yourself."

Her team at HOPE speaks highly of Ms. Seter.

"We have so many great educators that help inspire students, encourage team members and make every day run smoothly, and we are lucky to count Ms. Seter among them. She helps to empower our students to excel, and she brings out the best in all of us," said Christyn Holmes, Director of Academic Services for HOPE Online Learning Academy Co-Op.

For her outstanding contributions, Ms. Seter was honored as one of HOPE's two 2015 Apple Awards representatives, which is an award given out by HOPE's charter authorizer, the Douglas County School District. The Apple Awards recognize and celebrate the excellent and innovative teachers and faculty in the district. She was honored at an area event on Feb. 21.



Ms. Desirae Seter



## Giving students "HOPE" for their future

As Coloradans, we are lucky to live in a state which offers a diverse set of education options for students in k-12 grades. But these choices can be overwhelming, especially for families who have a student who is struggling to progress academically.

Ten years ago HOPE Online Learning Academy Co-Op became a school choice option for Colorado families. Its blended, community-based learning environment was the answer for students who never thought they would ever see graduation day.



Euriah

Meet Euriah, a current 8th grade HOPE student in Pueblo at Alpha Learning Academy. Euriah has attended HOPE for three years and is now reading at grade level. When he entered HOPE he was reading

two grade levels behind.

"I feel excited about my achievements and excited that I know that I can complete things from start to finish," said Euriah. "I never had teachers who cared about me like they do here."

Euriah's HOPE academic team worked hard collaborating on a reading program that would help him advance.

"We worked to improve decoding, comprehension and fluency. This program was used for our middle school students," said Ms. Sonya Churchill, Moderate Needs Teacher for HOPE at Alpha Learning Academy. "But it really came down to Euriah's HOPE mentor, Desirae, who also happens to be his mom. Her consistency and dedication made all the difference."

Desirae is very proud of her son's achievements.

"The HOPE system has worked for Euriah. Working at his own pace, and knowing right away where problem areas may be, has made him successful," she said.

HOPE at Alpha Learning Academy Director Ms. Celina Apodaca also points to smaller class sizes as a reason struggling students succeed at HOPE.

"We show our students we care and are making an investment in their education," she said.

Euriah's academic success has him re-thinking his future.

"I never thought about college because I don't like extra work. But I want to work towards college and maybe swim (I'm a competitive swimmer) and study art."

Enrollment for the 2015/2016 school year is now open!

Visit [HOPEonline.org](http://HOPEonline.org), or call 720-402-3000 for more information.

## HOPE students honored for Dr. King essays

Three HOPE students from Center of Hope Academy were named "honorable mention" in the ME & THE DREAM...Inventing My Dream essay contest sponsored in part by *Denver Urban Spectrum*. This contest was held as part of the exhibit at Cherry Creek Shopping Center during February to celebrate the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. View excerpts from these essays on [HOPEonline.org](http://HOPEonline.org).



## HOPE in the News

HOPE Online Learning Academy Co-Op visited 9NEWS during National School Choice Week in January to talk about how families can select the right education option for their child. A HOPE student from Brighton Leadership High Academy, Devean, shared that working at her own pace is the reason she has been with HOPE (and never missed a day) since kindergarten. Devean may be in just her first year of high school but she already has her sights set on completing some college courses prior to high school graduation!



# HOPEful Scientists

The Science Fair. It is an annual school event that students throughout the country compete in, including students at HOPE Online Learning Academy Co-Op.

Preparing for HOPE's Science Fair, called the Science Expo, starts at the HOPE Learning Center level. Science is an important part of the curriculum at HOPE, with students participating in many hands-on STEM activities and experiments throughout the year. The Science Fair is often a culminating activity, with a fair happening at the local Learning Center level to select the participants to send to the school-wide expo.

This year, nearly 40 students presented in the HOPE Science Expo, which took place on Thursday, Feb. 19, at the HOPE offices. The participants had put a lot of hard work into preparing. Each came to the event with a written report as well as a display board and an oral presentation for the judging panel.

Students selected their projects for a variety of reasons. For some, it was a curiosity factor. Others simply wanted to learn the scientific process.

Adreona, a HOPE student at Redeemer Learning Center, tested out cleaning products to figure out what killed germs the best.

"It was rubbing alcohol," said the 3rd grade student.

Fun was the name of the game in the "Silly, Stretchy, Slimy" science project done by two students from HOPE at Lighthouse Academy, Alyssa and Edith. These two discovered the winning combination to make silly putty.

"It was interesting to figure out," the pair said.

A team of middle school girls, Ashanti, Shania and Stephanie, from HOPE at Renewal Academy developed a consumer-driven project around popcorn.

"Pop Secret left the least kernels in the bag," the team said.

Nolan, a middle school student from HOPE at Ambassador's Academy, who was decked out in a suit and tie, set up an experiment that proved solar panels are a great tool for generating electricity.

"This is a lot of fun. I've been at HOPE for two years, and this is my second year to come," he said. Nolan placed 1st in the middle school division.

HOPE's Science Expo truly gives students the chance to test out their curiosities. In the process, they discover more in-depth the phenomena of STEM that is happening all around them on a daily basis. And, hopefully, for some, they will be inspired to pursue a career in STEM, a field that is always in high-demand of intelligent and passionate minds like these HOPE students.

## WINNERS OF THE 2015 SCIENCE EXPO

### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DIVISION

1. Gabriel – *Cherry Creek Hope Online*
2. Juan and Gael – *Renewal Academy*
3. Miguel – *THGA*

### MIDDLE SCHOOL DIVISION

1. Nolan – *Ambassador's Academy*
2. Abigayle – *Cherry Creek Hope Online*
3. Yatzari and Janelle – *Renewal Academy*

### HIGH SCHOOL DIVISION

1. Brittany – *Ambassador's Academy*
2. Kaileen, Abel and Amber – *New Hope Academy*
3. Danielle, Gerardo and Garrett – *Center of Hope Academy*



Abigayle and Sherida Peterson, HOPE's Executive Vice President of Academic Achievement



Stephen



Alyssa and Edith



Nolan



Ashanti, Shania and Stephanie



Tommy presenting to Judge Christyn Holmes, HOPE's Director of Academic Services



Amber, Kaileen and Abel

# Celebrating the Class of 2015

On Thursday, Jan. 22, the HOPE Online Learning Academy Co-Op Senior Class of 2015 visited the HOPE offices for the 2nd annual Senior Day. The day-long event helped HOPE seniors plan for graduation and life after high school.



# SLAM Poetry

On Tuesday, Feb. 10, HOPE Online Learning Academy Co-Op held the first-ever HOPE SLAM Poetry competition for middle and high school students. The event was hosted by HOPE at Awaken Academy in Arvada and eleven students participated. Three winners (from Awaken, Tetra and Action/Elmira) and an "honorable mention" (from Bridges of Silence) were named. View excerpts from the winning entries on HOPEonline.org.



SLAM Poetry winners

# HOPE students compete in annual Talent Show

Nineteen acts performed at HOPE's Got Talent, HOPE Online Learning Academy Co-Op's 3rd annual Talent Show on Thursday, Jan. 29, at the L2 Event Building in Denver. The acts competing in this event had been chosen from a preliminary pool earlier in January.

"I felt it was my best talent," said Dorothea, who chose to sing the popular song, *Let It Go*.

There was a diverse set of acts from dancers to singers, gymnasts and more. Weeks of practice had gone into preparing for the show.

Before going up on stage, we had the chance to sit down with some of the performers to hear what went into preparing for the big day.

"We are gymnasts and put together a lot of routines at home as a team," said Jami and



Aunjsiana, Aissata, Aja, Heavin and Tjerria

Bethaney, about how they developed their HOPE's Got Talent gymnastics act.

"Our mom helped us," commented Alannah, Kyla and Zoey, who dressed in blue body suits for their dance routine. The girls were also proud of their fox dance they performed in last year's show.

"I have been teaching myself spinning for about 6 months," said Amir, a high schooler who demonstrated basketball spinning on ballpoint pens.

"We've never sang before, just danced, so we are a little nervous," said singing duo, Eduardo and Brian, who ended up stealing the show in the elementary category for a song they sang completely in Spanish.

Many HOPE family members, friends and supporters attended to show their support. HOPE was also honored to have Sharon Alexander-Holt as our Master of Ceremonies as well as Cleo Parker Robinson with Cleo Parker Robinson Dance as one of our judges. The other judges included Janelle Ayon, Jeremy Wendelin and Kathi Belyea.

One of the most touching parts of event was the camaraderie shown between acts and

HOPE Learning Centers. This never felt like a competition for the student performers as they cheered for and supported each other.

While it was tough to choose the winners as everyone was top-notch, five acts, which touched the hearts of the judges, received awards for "best of show." One of the overall winners, Issac, wrote a rap about his mother who had recently passed away. The other overall winner, Zoey, performed a song called *Please Don't Cut*, which documented her journey to overcome cutting herself to alleviate the pain in her life.

"This Talent Show demonstrated what truly courageous students we have at HOPE. Many of them stepped out of their comfort zones and shared some very personal stories through artistic expression. This event is an opportunity for us to celebrate their accomplishments," said Heather O'Mara, Founder and CEO of HOPE Online Learning Academy Co-Op.

HOPE is looking forward to seeing what our students come up with for our HOPE's Got Talent in 2016!



Jami and Bethaney



Issac

## WINNERS OF THE 2015 HOPE TALENT SHOW

**HIGH SCHOOL DIVISION**  
Maria – Roca Fuerte High Learning Academy

**MIDDLE SCHOOL DIVISION**  
Juarez – Redeemer Learning Center

**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DIVISION**  
Eduardo and Brian – Re-Create Academy

**OVERALL WINNERS (A TIE)**  
Issac – Redeemer Learning Center and Zoey – Alpha Learning Academy



Sharon and Cleo with Nevaeh, Alyasia and Xylena



Eduardo and Brian

# Cyberschools Day at the State Capitol

Another cold and snowy winter day greeted Cyberschools Day 2015 at the Colorado State Capitol on Wednesday, Feb. 4. This is a day to share with lawmakers the success of Colorado's online education system. Center of Hope Academy and Redeemer Learning Center sent



students to the event. HOPE students had the opportunity to interact with lawmakers, including a special moment during the noon-time rally when one of the Center of Hope Academy students (decked out in his HOPE sweatshirt) was called up on stage by the Chair of the Colorado Senate Education Committee, Sen. Owen Hill (pictured). This student quickly became a Twitter sensation, with photos being shared all over by Sen. Hill and others. The student was carrying an important message about school choice (I Trust Parents).

# 2014/2015 Basketball

Dozens of HOPE students joined our winter sport, basketball. HOPE had both a high school girls' and boys' team in the All City Urban League, which is comprised of other area alternative schools. The middle school students organized into an intramural league comprised of four HOPE Learning Centers. On March 9, the high school boys' team played at the Charter School Court of Dreams Tournament at the Pepsi Center.



Boys' High School Basketball



Girls' High School Basketball



Middle School Basketball Champions (Center of Hope Academy)

**HOPE**  
ONLINE LEARNING ACADEMY

**HOPE Online Learning Academy Co-Op**  
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